

The end of the First World War

World War One ended in November, 1918. However, nobody called it 'World War One' at that time. How could they know that the effects of this war would cause another? It had been the most terrible war in history. Twenty million people had killed, half of them in combat. Many millions more were injured. The war cost nearly 36 billion. Towns and cities lay in ruins, good agricultural land was blasted and full of unexploded shells, railways, roads, factories and bridges were destroyed. Few people believed that there would be another war after such death and destruction. In fact, it was called for a time, **'The War to End All Wars'**.

Europe was very different at the end of the war. In 1914, Russia, Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire were all ruled by Emperors. In 1917, Russia underwent a Revolution in which the Communists seized power and shot the Tsar and his family. The Emperors of Germany and Austro-Hungarian were also forced to flee and give up their thrones and leave. At the start of the war both Britain and France had been wealthy countries but due to the cost of the war they were almost bankrupt by 1918.

Although the war was over, a peace settlement still had to be made. In Paris in 1919, the leaders of the victorious countries met to discuss this. They were dominated by 'The Big Three' who were Georges Clemenceau of France, the American President, Woodrow Wilson and David Lloyd George, Prime Minister of Britain. Germany was not invited to the peace conference.

Activities:

1. Copy and complete the paragraph below by filling in the missing words:

In November 19___, The First World War final came to an end. _____ million men had been killed in the fighting and over _____ million had been spent. In G_____ and the A_____ - H_____ Empire, the Emperors had fled and in Russia, the C_____ came to power. World War One was called The 'War to ___ all ___'.

2. Why was the First World War called the 'War to end all Wars'?

3. What was the name of the British Prime Minister in 1919?

4. Which country was not invited to the peace conference in Paris?

5. How do you think the country mentioned in your last answer would feel?

German Reaction to the Cease-fire

Many Germans were shocked when they heard the fighting was over. During the war, the German Government had practised strict censorship and hadn't told their people of defeats. In 1917, Germany had even defeated the Russian Army. Many ordinary Germans believed that Germany was winning the war even in 1918.

On 7th November 1918, the French general Marshal Foch, received a small group of German generals at his headquarters in the Forest of Compiègne. They wanted an end to the war. Foch told them the Allied terms: Germans to leave all occupied territory, to surrender their arms and warships, withdraw all forces from west of the River Rhine. Marshal Foch gave the Germans 72 hours to decide their answer. He had it by the following day. On 10th November, the German Emperor fled; next day the new Government signed the Armistice (or cease-fire). Fighting stopped on all battlefronts at **11'O' Clock on the 11th November 1918.**

Many German soldiers felt bitterly betrayed. They said 'they had been stabbed in the back' by the new Government who they called '**The November Criminals**'. Here is one typical reaction:

Source B: Adolf Hitler, 1923.

So it had all been in vain. In vain all the sacrifices and privations ... in vain the hours in which, with moral fear clutching at our hearts we nevertheless did our duty; in vain the deaths of two millions ... had they died for this? So that a gang of wretched criminals could lay their hands on the Fatherland?

The author was Adolf Hitler, then a German soldier recovering his sight after having been gassed in the war. By the phrase 'gang of wretched criminals' he meant the new German Government and by 'Fatherland' he meant Germany itself.

Activities

1. Why were so many Germans surprised when Germany lost the war?
2. What were the terms of the cease-fire?
3. How long were the Germans given to make up their minds?
4. When and at what time did the fighting stop?
5. Look at Source B. Why did so many Germans feel bitter about the cease-fire?
6. Why did Adolf Hitler call the members of the German Government the 'November Criminals'?